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ABSTRACT

The findings are presented of two research studies designed to identify the causes of perceived inefficient and ineffective performance by administrators in institutions of higher education. The first study examined operational dissonance among the three levels of academic administrators (chairpersons, deans, and provosts) in complex research-oriented universities, and the second examined task-specific tension and stress levels and their effects on the quality of administrator decision-making. The results disclosed incongruent role perceptions and expectations leading to dysfunctional performance, and particularized the tasks promoting low quality decision-making due to stress. Remediation methodologies to increase role consonance and reduce stress are postulated toward elevating the quality of administrative performance. (Author)

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THE IDENTIFIED NEED AND MEANS FOR THE INHOUSE TRAINING OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

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ABSTRACT

The Identified Need and Means for the Inhouse Training
of Higher Education Administrators

This paper presents the findings of two research studies designed to identify the causes of perceived inefficient and ineffective performance by administrators in institutions of higher education. The first study examined operational dissonance among the three levels of academic administrators (chairpersons, deans, and provosts) in complex research-oriented universities, and the second examined task-specific tension and stress levels and their effects on the quality of administrator decision-making. The results disclosed incongruent role perceptions and expectations leading to dysfunctional performance, and particularized the tasks promoting low quality decision-making due to stress. Remediation methodologies to increase role consonance and reduce stress are postulated toward elevating the quality of administrative performance.

The Identified Need and Means for the Inhouse Training of Higher Education Administrators

Higher education administration has long been considered the bastion of logical, pragmatic decision-making practiced by controlled, rational, and scholarly individuals possessing unquestioned expertise in their fields. This idyllic view of the decision environment has been perpetuated and imbued with a philosophical sanctity by popular demand as well as by institutional practice. As a result of this view, the natural inclination has been to maintain a laissez-faire posture with regard to the training of administrators as they progressed through the traditional pattern from faculty member, to chairman, to dean, to provost, and on to President.

Studies of the pattern of accession to administrative positions disclose that only a very small number of practicing administrators have had any previous training in administrative job requirements. (Cohen & March, 1974; Ferrari, 1970; Socolow, 1978) While programs for the training of incoming practitioners and researchers in higher education exist (Dressel, Johnson & Marcus, 1971; Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1977) little attention has been paid to the inhouse training of current administrators who have never initially been educated for the jobs into which they have moved.

Fisher (1977) has proposed several reasons for providing job training for practicing administrators:

> This might be due primarily to a need to keep abreast of new and complex higher education issues that have implications for administrative role responsibilities and opportunities; it might be the need for updating oneself in administrative concern; it might also be the need, particularly in the case of novice

administrators, for specific role guidelines (duties, authority, and responsibility) and the development of individual skills, styles, and operating strategies relating to organizational behavior, interpersonal relations, communications, leadership methods, decision-making, effecting change, time management, and delegations; finally, it might well transcend the cognitive aspects of learning and reflect the often-neglected affective domain and the need for personal growth and renewal.

And while many authors agree as to the need for such training for any or all of these reasons, or for different reasons, (Bolman, 1964; Dobbins, 1972; Edwards & Pruyne, 1976; Maurer, 1976) and have proposed mechanisms for such programs, mostly in the form of external consultive workshops, (Galloway & Fisher, 1977; Henderson, 1970; Ryan, 1976) little direct research has been performed to isolate the areas of administrative inabilities and thus the areas in which such training should be focused. This paper describes two such research endeavors.

The studies reported herein have approached the issue of college and university administrative abilities and performance from complementary survey and experimental research perspectives. The research, conducted at the University of Washington and thirty additional large research-oriented institutions, indicated that administrators fully comprehended neither the parameters of their own roles/tasks nor the roles/tasks of fellow administrators. Included within these parameters was knowledge of appropriate energy expenditures to complete goals, i.e., tension and/or stress levels. Thus, administrators without prior training did not comprehend their role responsibilities and

those of related others, and were not sufficiently trained to cope with the decision-making environment in which they found themselves.

These inconsistent perceptions and misunderstandings of the role functions of the primary administrators, i.e., Provosts, Deans, and Department Chairpersons, lead to inefficient and ineffective operations in many areas. "Lack of consensus among group members on their role definitions is a major dysfunctional element affecting the achievement of a group's goals." (Gross, Mason & McEachern, 1958). Such ambiguity of functions in a complex organization like a university leads to duplication or omission of responsibilities, and, equally serious, results in considerable miscommunication amongst levels so as to adversely affect effective decision-making. (Krech, Crutchfield & Bellachey, 1962).

Studies have been conducted identifying the specific role prescriptions, or job functions, of the various administrative officers in complex structured universities, including studies of provosts and deans (Dibden, 1968; Gould, 1964; Higgins, 1946; Linnel, 1975; Milner, 1936; Reeves & Russel, 1929, 1932; Ward, 1934) and of department chairpersons (Dressel, Johnson & Marcus, 1969; Gunter, 1964; Heimler, 1967; McLaughlin & Montgomery, 1976; McLaughlin, Montgomery & Malpass, 1975; Roach, 1975; Waltzer, 1965). Others have investigated the need and importance of consonant role understandings (role analysis theory) for effective prediction of administrative behavior and its advantages to efficient management operations (Dreeben & Gross, 1967; Gross, et al., 1958). The first study described herein applied such analysis to determine which particular areas of dissonance in the mutual understanding of role perceptions and performance exist to block the effective exchange of information between levels of managers in higher education. Such identification thereby permits

evidencing first, whether dissonance actually exists, and second, in which areas the dissonance depicts administrative problems, allowing the formulation of programs for remediation and training particularly geared towards the actual higher education setting.

The study was conducted based on data collected in a survey of 627 active administrators selected from the institutions which are members of the Association of American Universities.[1] Based upon the role prescriptions and job functions delineated in previous reported studies of role characteristics of each of the administrators, questionnaires were developed which requested the respondents to characterize their role functions and the degree of interaction with the related other administrators on these certain functions, and to similarly describe the observed performance of the role functions of other related administrators. Three separate questionnaire forms were used, one for each administrative group, with each form containing synchronized questions to the other forms, in order that corresponding data could be collected from each of the three administrative performers (Provosts, N=44; Deans, N=136; and Department Chairpersons, N=447). Statistical analyses were performed to determine significant differences on the 114 separate operational variables investigated. Completed questionnaires were received from 417 (or 67%) of the administrators requested (Provosts, n=28; Deans, n=99; Department Chairpersons, n=290).

In order to obtain a systematic depiction of the individual role perceptions and observed performances, the questions were grouped, for data

analysis purposes, into four categories: communication processes, accountability, functional responsibilities, and areas of primary influence. The questions were tailored to rankings and 5-point scaled responses, and data analysis was performed by means of chi square (x^2) with level of significance p .05. Aggregate analysis was performed through use of a probability curve of testing significance for a series of related statistical tests (Sakoda, Cohen & Beall, 1964).

Results disclosed significant differences comparing role perceptions with others observed job performance in the aggregate measures between all levels. In other words, Provosts/Deans, Provost/Chairpersons, and Deans/Chairpersons comparisons all resulted in aggregate findings that what each says he/she does is significantly different from what the other administrators, to whom he/she reports or is reported to, observes the related other as doing. There is dissonance, at a statistically significant level, between administrators, leading to the overall suggestion that between the various levels of management within the organization of complex institutions of higher education serious problems exist, because of the lack of knowledge of job responsibilities, leading to inefficiency.

Particularly acute dissonance problems manifested themselves in responses to perceived areas of individual's responsibility and overall communication. For example, Provosts claimed high levels of knowledge of departmental programs but Chairpersons reflected their belief that, based on central administrative actions, provosts had basically no knowledge of departmental programs. Further, general discontent over communication exchange was

evidenced by a response by over 50% of all constituencies participating that the processes in higher education are totally ineffective to permit necessary and meaningful exchanges of information between levels. Thus, all administrators agree on the need for improved communication networks within the institutions.

Most important, specific areas of operational responsibility were examined to determine the actual job functions and/or tasks performed by each role participant and the satisfaction level of the other related administrators as to the performance. Consonance occurred as to the primary budgetary and organizational responsibilities of provosts; but no consonance evolved in an examination of the responsibilities of deans, particuarly as observed by chairpersons. Whereas deans viewed themselves as academic program and policy planners, chairpersons viewed them as failing totally in the performance of that job function. Chairpersons perceived deans acted primarily as managers of the budgetary operations of the college, pursuant to the dictates passed down to them by provosts, and not as academic innovators or programmers. Chairpersons' responses clearly evidenced a failure of knowledge of the actual job responsibilities of the dean, and correspondingly observed them as having little effect on the overall policies of the University.

The overall effectiveness of each administrative authority was tested in terms of the actual and perceived power to accomplish the traditional functions ascribed to each position. Deans were observed by chairpersons, as stated, as ineffective in this regard. Chairpersons believed that deans were usurped in their functions by provosts, and deans felt that same helplessness in their perceptions that they had considerably less influence over

the course of their colleges' futures than did provosts. This feeling of lack of effective power was pervasive throughout the study at all levels of administration examined. No one group of administrators responded that they perceived they had sufficient influence to affect decisions, but each believed that power rested in another group. However, while all the groups indicated certain frustrations in their perceived effectiveness, they all, interestingly, indicated high levels of satisfaction in their roles.

The study findings resulted in statistically significant differences in perceptions and observed performances, indicating high levels of dissonance among all three levels of administrators examined. Particular areas of concern included lack of consensus of role responsibilities and communication disfunctions. These problems require the conclusion that organizational effectiveness and efficiency severely suffers in higher educational institutions. Training programs to enhance the level of mutual understanding of functional responsibilities for each role, and clarifying communication and operational networks, are methodologies postulated to combat these problems.

The aforementioned study disclosed the fact that the more uncertainty about functional responsibilities within a system of related decision-makers, the less effective the organization is in accomplishing its goals -- in rendering high quality decisions. Often, "uncertainty" stems from the lack of relevant information for making decisions, that is, a limited amount of information to which a meaningful task oriented response is possible. This lack of information may be brought to the job, and perpetuated therein, because of an initial lack of administrative abilities. The second but related study investigated the effects of tension, anxiety and/or stress in

relation to this uncertainty and resultant ineffective, inefficient behaviors practiced by administrators when confronted with specific task situations; the above elements were defined as stressors.

Tension may be a stressor, or may become a stressor. Whether it is adaptive or maladaptive depends upon the individual's skills in employing tension levels that are consistent with the tasks to be accomplished. As a stressor, prolonged tension may cause stress. According to Selye (1956), stress is the rate of all wear and tear on the human organism, irrespective of classification of stressor, producing bodily changes of a reactive nature, e.g., elevated heart rate, blood pressure, muscle action potentials. Of critical importance is the fact that stress may not only indirectly impair administrative performance, but "...stress, (in a direct mode), a growing dossier of evidence indicates, may be the executive's single most powerful and pervasive enemy, playing a role in a wide variety of maladies, from back pain to heart attacks." (Smith, 1975, p. 89).

Stressors are any agents, real or imagined, which cause the individual to experience significant change in sympathetic arousal, e.g., heart rate, blood pressure, muscle action potentials (tension). Any of the above autonomic measures may be stressors as well. Increases may potentially be either beneficial or detrimental to the individual's well-being. A stressor may be dealt with effectively, as evidenced by reduced heart rate and/or tension, or the coping process may itself be inappropriate and become an additional stressor. In this study graduate students role-playing as administrators completed tasks (stressors), in which they experienced varying (depending on the task) increases in tension and anxiety.[2]

Four simulated administrator tasks were employed. They were developed from four general, loosely defined areas of concentrated administrative decision-making activity. According to Adams, Kellogg, and Schroeder (1976), the areas of concern could be: 1) personnel; 2) institutional goal-setting - space utilization; 3) faculty performance evaluation - academic freedom, and 4) budgeting. Each of the tasks was tested to determine its capability to generate tension and/or stress. In nearly all cases, heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle action potential levels increased significantly from an adaptation period to the task performance period, then dropped again during the recovery period. In addition, a negative correlation between anxiety levels and quality of decision-making was significant; for the space utilization and personnel tasks, higher anxiety levels precipitated reduced quality of decision-making. A quality decision is complementary to the goals of the decision-maker and is typically the best possible job done through utilization of available resources.

In addition to those general results, the study found that on the space utilization, personnel, and budget tasks, a weak, yet significant pattern developed regarding subjects' perceptions of tasks causing increased stress and therefore less satisfaction with decisions. Where certain physiological indices of the stressor effect increased, especially systolic blood pressure, subjects also perceived the tasks as more stressful. At the same time they felt less satisfied with their decisions. Further evidence of the accuracy of these perceptions was provided by correlating subjects' post-task paper/pencil evaluations of anxiety with their perceptions of stress and satisfaction with decisions. When anxiety levels rose, subjects perceived tasks as more stressful and were less satisfied with their decisions.

While the Pearson Product Moment Correlations providing evidence of a relationship among the above measures were small and thus not statistically suitable as a basis for substantiated conclusions, the results of analysis of variance indicated that task content, quality, and/or difficulty was responsible for significant variability in subjects perceptions of post-task tension levels and in the quality of their decision-making. This latter fact is especially critical in light of the first reported study's findings regarding dissonance between role/task perceptions and performances.

The realm of higher education administration deserves definition as a highly complex decision-making environment. And, the multiplicity of factors and the interconnections among the factors generate complex needs. To function in this atmosphere administrators must achieve and maintain a multifaceted equilibrium. They must have a sound philosophical and pragmatic understanding of their roles/tasks as individuals and of their working interrelationships with fellow administrators. The catalysts that allow the above ecosystem to function include the initial knowledge of their role and the skills to allow the utilization of that optimal portion of an administrator's energy reserve, i.e., the proper amount of tension or stress for completion of a given task, the capability to identify problems, and data acquisition and information production skills. The fact that the above system does not function smoothly is ultimately attributable to the failure of colleges and universities to train and orient their administrators to their institutional roles/tasks.

With the particularization of the areas in which deficiencies are evident, and the recognition of the collective and individual requirements

of these needs, training programs of the types necessary to alleviate these deficiencies might follow the course of inhouse training programs. Such training should be conducted for novice administrators as well as those with years of prior service. Specifically, two suggested formats might include:

1. Group training to enhance consonance of role perceptions and performance.

Early psychological research has found that in the absence of common understandings of role prescriptions and responsibilities, each of the persons within the organization's goals "will have some uncertainty, or even anxiety.. The more important it is for them to pool their efforts - in working, in planning, or even playing - the more essential is an awareness of consensus about matter relevant to their association." (Newcomb, Turner & Converse, 1965).

With the overall dissonance demonstrated between administrators and their counterparts in terms of common understandings of role responsibilities, it becomes necessary to institute programs which will clarify for all these responsibilities. Group orientations, held on a yearly basis, at the outset of each academic year for all levels of administration together, should serve to clarify role functions, operational procedures, and communication patterns utilized at the particular university. Functional role responsibilities should be delineated. and interrelationships between roles specifically addressed. By this means, overlap - or more important - gaps in functions will be reduced, and consensus heightened, resulting in more efficient operations. Functional expectations would no longer be dissimilar, allowing effective reliance by each operational level on the other.

Further, ongoing colloquia, particularly at the college level, involving chairpersons and the dean of the singular internal unit, should be held. Since the study demonstrated particularly high numbers of items evidencing dissonance between deans' and chairpersons' perceptions and observed performances, special concern should be shown towards training at the college level. Since data generation originates at the department, (it is estimated that 80% of the University decisions are made at that level (Roach, 1976)), and final implementation of policies occurs there also, training for consonant role performance at that level becomes particularly critical.

2. Individual training sessions, geared to particular task content areas and stress reduction.

Instruction aimed at increasing the competence (and confidence) of individual administrators in terms of the functional job responsibilities will enable each to more effectively fulfill the role prescription. As Smart and Elton (1976) pointed out in their study of role responsibilities of chairpersons, "...special skills and capabilities are essential for the survival and success of individual chairmen" and it should no longer be expected that such skills are inherently present simply because of their previous observational positions as members of the faculty. If reliance is to be placed by one administrative level on the functions of another, it is necessary to insure that each individual has the skills necessary to perform the functions.

Particular training should be given in areas of personnel and budgeting. These task areas evidenced the greatest levels of anxiety production, resulting in reduced decision-making capabilities. Higher education administrator

preparation should also encompass a more extensive understanding of the stress concept as developed by Selye (1956, 1974) and active participation in tension control training as outlined by Jacobson (1971).

"...Trial and error learning alone can be very expensive and inefficient both for the administrator and the institution." (Fisher, 1977) As these studies have shown, the below par management of the institution and the excessive wear-and-tear on the individual administrator are the result of the lack of prior - and ongoing - inhouse training of responsible officials. Programs for remediation of existing problems, and for prevention of future ones, of the types suggested herein, should professionalize the administrators talents resulting in rewarding experiences for the individual, and efficient operations for the institution.

Footnotes

1 This study is more fully reported in Olswang, S. G., A Comparative Study of Role Prescriptions, Perceptions, and Performances of Provosts, Deans and Department Chairpersons, An Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Washington, 1977.

2 This study is more fully reported in Cohen, W. D., Higher Education Decision-Making: The Qualitative Effects of Tension Producing Situations, An Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Washington, 1978.

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